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THE  
S P E E C H  
OF

R. B. SHERIDAN, Esq.

On Wednesday, the 7th of February, 1787,

In bringing forward the Fourth Charge against

WARREN HASTINGS, Esq.

Relative to the BEGUMS of OUDE.

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THE SECOND EDITION, Revised, Corrected, and Enlarged.

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[Price One Shilling.]

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# PREFATORY ADDRESS

FROM THE

PUBLISHER.

**S***OLICITOUS as the public are to have a perfect copy of the most eloquent speech that was ever delivered in Parliament, their wishes must be in a great measure disappointed from the very liberal determination of Mr. Sheridan to give no kind of assistance in reporting it publickly; a determination that does as much honour to his humanity, as his Oration does to his abilities.—Having called forth his wonderful talents whilst in the double office of a senator, and an accuser of the great delinquent, he now sinks the apparent, tho' just severity of the public character, in the humane sensibility of the private individual; and generously withholds that torrent of eloquence which must excite in every breast sentiments of indignation against the atrocity which demanded it to flow.—The intention of this publication is not to excite those sensations*

sations the noble-minded speaker wishes to suppress; it is not to hold forth the character of an Eastern spoiler, for "scorn to point the finger at;"—it is meant to commemorate the virtues of a patriot mind, vindicating the honor of his country, and pleading the cause of humanity; and, as near as is in the power of recollection, to preserve to the public eye, partially at least, one of the most complete pieces of Oratory that ever graced an English, or any other Senate.

In doing this, the Reporter frankly confesses the fallibility of the means—all that he can boast is, to have come as near the original as the reminiscient faculties of a person habituated to parliamentary business, would permit. How far they have succeeded, those who had the felicity of being present, are the most competent to judge.

Mr.



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# Mr. SHERIDAN'S SPEECH,

FEBRUARY 7, 1787,

ON THE  
*Fourth Charge against Mr. Hastings:*

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**I**N a Committee of the whole House, Mr. St. John in the chair.

Mr. Dempster having communicated to the house; that a paper, which he held in his hand, had been received by him from Sir Elijah Impey, with a request that he would read it, as it was explanatory of some passages which he had given in evidence at the bar of the House; but which explanation the House did not think proper to receive; but from the mouth of Sir Elijah Impey himself, and he not being present, Mr. SHERIDAN was called upon.

B

Mr.

Mr. *Sheridan*, during a speech which lasted near five hours and three quarters, commanded the most profound attention and admiration of the House. His matchless oration united the most solid argument with the most persuasive eloquence. His sound reasoning giving additional energy to truth, and his logical perspicuity, and unerring judgment, throwing a light upon, and pervading the obscurity, of the most involved and complicated subject.

Mr. *Sheridan's* pre-eminence and unrivalled abilities, will, from this period, stand recorded, as having had power to assimilate the most discordant sentiments, upon a great and trying occasion, and (with a few exceptions,) to unite the various opinions of the multitude in one point.—He commenced his elegant speech by saying, that had it been possible to have received, without the violation of the established rules of Parliament, the paper which the Honourable Gentleman (Mr. *Dempster*) had just now read, he should willingly have receded from any forms of the House, for the purpose of obtaining farther illustration of the subject then before them: yet he had not come so ill prepared, as, by a trifling circumstance, to be prevented from proceeding to the discharge



discharge of his duty, or that the want of it could make any impression on the body of proof he was to bring forward that day against Warren Hastings.

In his opinion, the explanation of the evidence, so far from throwing any new light upon it and clearing it up, rendered it even more obscure and contradictory than before. Every art was made use of to impress the House with an idea that this business was not of the most serious nature. But this was far beneath his notice. The justice and strength of his cause were not to be overcome by such pitiful and flimsy expedients; nor should he waste his time in opposing measures which were as paltry and inefficacious, as they were insidious.

He would not, he said, encroach upon the time of the committee with any general arguments to prove, what was in itself so obvious, that the subject of the charge, which it fell to his lot to bring forward, was of great magnitude. The attention Parliament had bestowed upon Indian concerns for many sessions past; the voluminous productions of their committees on that subject, the various proceedings in that House respecting it, their own strong

and pointed resolutions, the repeated recommendations of his Majesty, and their repeated assurances of paying due regard to those recommendations, as well as various acts of the legislature, were, all of them, undeniable proofs of the moment and magnitude of the consideration, and tended to establish this broad fact, that they acknowledged the British name and character to have been dishonoured and detested throughout India, by the malversation and crimes of the servants of the East India Company. That fact having been established beyond all question, by themselves and their own acts, there needed no argument, on his part, to induce the committee to see the importance of the subject about to be discussed that day, in a more striking point of view than they had themselves placed it in.

There were, he knew, persons, without doors, who affected to ridicule the idea of prosecuting Mr. Hastings, and, in proportion as the prosecution became more serious, to increase their sarcasms upon the subject, by asserting that Parliament might be more usefully employed; that there were matters of more immediate moment to engage their attention; that a Commercial Treaty with France had just



just been concluded, and that it was an object of a vast comprehensive nature, and was of itself sufficient to engross their consideration.

To all this he would oppose these questions : Was Parliament mispending its time, by enquiring into the oppressions practised on millions of unfortunate persons in India, and endeavouring to bring the daring delinquents, who had been guilty of the most flagrant acts of enormous tyranny and rapacious speculation, to exemplary and condign punishment ? Was it improperly employed in giving an eminent but severe example to their future servants, of the madness and folly of relying on corruption and sycophancy for support, in the day of trial for their crimes ? Was it a misuse of their functions, to be diligent in attempting, by the most effectual means, to wipe off the disgrace that stood affixed to the British name in India, and to rescue the national character from lasting infamy ? Were the good faith and credit of Britain of no consequence in the eyes of the representatives of the nation ? Surely no man who felt for either the one or the other, would think that a business of greater moment or magnitude could occupy his attention, or that the House could with too much steadiness, too ardent a zeal, or too industrious

a perseverance, pursue its object. Indeed they must all know and feel the necessity of bringing this important case to the issue now intended. Their conduct in this respect last year had done them immortal honour, and proved to all the world, that, however degenerate an example of the conduct of Englishmen, some of the British subjects had exhibited in India, the people of England collectively, speaking and acting by their representatives, felt as men should feel on such an occasion; that they were anxious to do justice, by redressing injuries and punishing offenders, however high their rank, however elevated their station,

Mr. Sheridan said he would exhibit to their view a body of information, which would prove the commission of the most horrid crimes ever conceived by the foulest heart that ever inhabited a human frame; facts which persons of every party, of every political bias in this kingdom, had been assisting in bringing to view. In these had the indefatigable attention and labour of several committees been employed; it was the work of many years: these were fully demonstrated in the various clear and elaborate reports which had been long upon their table; their long and interesting debates



bates; their solemn address to the throne, and their rigorous legislative acts.

The vote of the House last session, wherein the conduct of this pillar of India, this corner stone of our strength in the east, this talisman of the British dominions in Asia, was censured, did the greatest honour to that house, as it must be the fore-runner of speedy justice on *that character* which was said to be above censure, and whose conduct, we were given to understand, was above suspicion. His deeds were such, they could not be justified by any possible necessity; for no situation, however elevated, however embarrassed, could justify a man for committing acts of rapacity upon individuals. To the honour of that House, they had resisted the monstrous argument attempted to be set up, they had shewn their detestation of that novel and base scepticism on the principles of judicial enquiry, constantly the language of the Governor General's *servile dependents*; that such horrid crimes should be compounded; that, though *M. Hastings* might be guilty of all the charges exhibited against him, he ought not to be punished; he should still be considered as the *saviour of India*, and that fortunate events were a full and complete set-off against a system of oppression, corrup-

tion, breach of faith, peculation and treachery. What though King, Lords, and Commons, were against him, he was not a person to be assailed ; for he had a vote of thanks from the Court of Proprietors in his pocket. The committee had, however, nobly combated such doctrine, and declared that *Mr. Hastings's* treatment of *Cbeyt Sing* was unjustifiable upon any ground of political necessity. Their solemn and awful judgment, that in the case of Benares, *Mr. Hastings's* conduct was a proper object of parliamentary impeachment, had covered them with applause, and brought them forward in the face of all the world as the objects of perpetual admiration. To use the words of a Right Honourable Gentleman (*Mr. Pitt*) on this subject, the committee had found in the administration of *Mr. Hastings*, "*Acts of strong injustice, of grinding oppression, and unprovoked severity.*" That committee had also rescued his Right Honourable Friend (*Mr. Burke*) from the imputation of being a false accuser, they had shewn that he was not moved by envy, by malice, nor any unworthy motives to blacken a spotless name ; they had approved him to be, what in reality he was, an indefatigable, and, he was happy to add, a successful, champion in the cause of truth, humanity, and justice. With sound judgment, with manly firmness,



ness, with unshaken integrity, had his Right Honourable Friend resisted the timid policy of mere *remedial* acts. Even the high opinion of Mr. Hastings's successor, even the admitted worth of Lord Cornwallis's character, had been deemed by him an inadequate atonement to India for the injuries so heavily inflicted on her. The committee had by their vote solemnly pledged themselves to India. They had audibly said to the inhabitants of that country; There shall be no more *remedial* acts: You shall no longer be seduced into temporary acquiescence, by sending out a titled governor, or a vapouring set of resolutions; It is not with stars and ribbands, and all the badges of regal favour, that we atone to you for past delinquencies, these should bend to the sacred shrine of justice, and the people of India shall be convinced of our honest intentions. You shall have the solid consolation of seeing an end to your grievances, by an example of punishment for past offences. The House has set up a beacon, which, while it served as a guide to themselves, would also make their motions more conspicuous to the world that surrounded and beheld them. He had no doubt of their manly determination to go through the whole of the business, with the same steadiness which

gave

gave such sterling brilliancy of character to their outset, and that they might safely challenge the world, to observe and judge of them by the result.

After an exordium of this tendency, Mr. Sheridan took notice of a paper, signed "Warren Hastings," which had been put into his hand, as he entered the house that day, and which he considered as a second defence, and a second answer to the charge he was about to bring forward; a charge, replete with proof of criminality of the blackest die, of tyranny the most base and unprecedented, of treachery the most vile and premeditated, of corruption the most open and shameless, of oppression the most grinding and severe, and cruelty the most unmanly and unparalleled.

There never was a question since the creation of the world, wherein so much cruelty, wickedness, inhumanity and depravity, were put to the test, as in the present case. He was no party accuser: "I call," said Mr. Sheridan, "upon his advocates to watch my words, and to take them down. I will exhibit no charge that has not solid truth for its foundation, for I trust nothing to declamation." Mr. Sheridan



ridan added; he was far from meaning to rest the charge on assertion, or on any warm expressions that the impulse of wounded feelings might produce: He would establish every part of the charge, by the most unanswerable proof, and the most unquestionable evidence; the witness, whom he would bring forth to support every fact he intended to state, should be, for the most part, a witness that no man would venture to contradict; no other than *Warren Hastings* himself!

And yet such a character had friends—he blamed them not—they might possibly conclude him innocent;—because he himself asserted it was so.

The defence of Mr. Hastings would establish every charge he had to make against him. There was not one fact which was not founded on, or mixed with falsehood; no one question that was truly given; nor one single conclusion which followed fairly from the premises laid down: but of this assertion, the multiplied proofs would shortly arise.

Mr. Sheridan said he would go farther back into a detail of facts than his Right Honourable friend

friend had done in his charge, in order the more clearly to shew the committee the situation in which the British government of India stood with respect to the Nabob of Oude and the Begums, till the design of obliging the Nabob to plunder those unfortunate Princesses (his mother and grandmother) of their treasures, to confiscate their Jaghires and seize upon the ministers, throw them into a dungeon, there load them with chains, and keep them for many months close prisoners, suffering incredible hardships, was first entertained by the Governor General,

Mr. Sheridan here read a variety of extracts from Mr. Hastings's defence; wherein were stated the various steps taken by Mr. *Bristow*, (the Company's Resident at Fyzyabad,) in the years 1775 and 1776, to procure aid for the Nabob, from the Begum, (the dowager princesses of that district,) and that he thought proper to exact, by his sole authority, thirty lacks of rupees, for the use of the Nabob Vizier of Oude, out of the treasures bequeathed to the Begum by her late husband Sujah Dowla; obtaining however the guarantee of the Governor and Council that, that exaction, for which no shadow of right was shewn, should be the last. Mr. Hastings, however, had not stated one of the facts



facts truly. Groundless, nugatory and insulting were his affirmations, that the seizure of treasures from the Begums, and the exposition of their pilfered goods to public auction, (unparalleled acts of open injustice, oppression and inhumanity) were in any degree to be defended by those incroachments on their property, which had taken place previous to his administration, or by those sales which they themselves had solicited, as a favourable mode of their supplying a part of their aid to the Nabob. The relation of a series of plain indisputable facts, would irrecoverably overthrow a subterfuge so pitiful, a distinction so ridiculous. It must be remembered that, at that period, the Begums did not *merely desire*, but they most *expressly stipulated*, that of the thirty lacks promised, eleven should be paid in sundry articles of manufacture. Was it not obvious therefore, that the sale of goods in the first case, far from partaking of the nature of an act of plunder, became an extension of relief, of indulgence, and of accommodation. By the passages which he should beg leave to read, Mr. Hastings wished to insinuate that a claim was set up to the Begum's treasure, as belonging of right to the Nabob. In this transaction Mr. Hastings endeavoured to shift the responsibility from himself to the majority  
of

of the Council, and under that authority to keep alive the Nabob's right.

Mr. Sheridan, in order to prove the oppression of the Princesses in 1775, which was much aggravated in 1781, read an extract of a letter from the Bhow Begum, mother of the Nabob, to Mr. Hastings, received at Calcutta December 22, 1775, wherein she says, "If it is *your pleasure* that the mother of the late Nabob, myself, and his other women, and infant children, should be reduced to a state of dishonour and distress, we *must submit*; but if, on the contrary, you call to mind the friendship of the late blessed Nabob, you will exert yourself effectually in favour of us, who are helpless." And again, "If you do not approve of my remaining at Fyzyabad, send a person here, in your name, to remove the mother of the late Nabob, myself, and about 2000 women and children, that we may reside with honour and reputation in some other place." This letter and several others were read, to prove the controuling power of Mr. Hastings in Oude, at so late a period as before mentioned; and to prove that every circumstance of oppression and exaction, practised on these Princesses, was done by the orders, consent,



sent, and approbation, of the Governor, who was supposed to be paramount in Oude.

*Treasure*, which was the true source of all the cruelties, was the original pretence which Mr. Hastings made to the Company for the measure; and through the whole of his conduct he makes Mahomedanism an excuse; as if he meant to insinuate, that there was something in Mahomedanism which made it impious in a son, not to plunder his mother. But, to shew how the question precisely stood when Mr. Hastings begun the attack, Mr. Sheridan read the Minutes of General Clavering, Colonel Monson, and Mr. Francis, who severally spoke of a claim which had been made by the Nabob on the Bhow Begum, in the year 1775, amounting to two and a half lacks. The opinion contained in those minutes was, that women were, on the death of their husbands, entitled by the Mahomedan law, only to the property within the Zenana where they lived. This opinion was decisive. Mr. Bristow used no threats; no military execution or rigor was even menaced the Begums complied with the requisition then made, and the disputed property then claimed was given up.

After

After this, the farther treasure that was within the Zenana, was confessedly her own. No farther right was set up, no pretence of any kind was advanced, to claim the residue. Nay, a treaty was signed by the Nabob, and ratified, by the Resident, Mr. Bristow that, on her paying thirty lacs, she should be freed from all farther applications; and the Company were bound, by Mr. Bristow, to guarantee this treaty. Here then was the issue. After this treaty thus ratified, could there be an argument as to the right of the treasures of the Begums? If the Mahomedan law had given a right, was not that right concluded?

Mr. Sheridan averred, that the Mahomedan law did not authorize the seizure of the Princesses property; that several jaghires were left them by the late Nabob Sujah Doulah for their own maintenance, and the education of their children; that the plunder was never authorized by the Board; and that military execution being used for the recovery of the exactions, was contrary to every principle of justice; and that the Nabob complied reluctantly in many instances: that Mr. Bristow acted under the orders of his immediate superior: that, when the whole transaction was censured, Mr. Hastings then threw off all responsibility, and appealed to



pealed to the orders of the Board, at a time, when he knew the authority of the Board was vested in himself alone, there being only one other member; and the Governor having the casting voice, every act must become his own. This, said Mr. Sheridan, is somewhat similar to the following case.—If, some five years hence, I was to become a warm admirer of Mr. Hastings's late administration, and from friendship, become his panegyrist; would not some person who hears me now, remind me of my accusations against him, and say to me, Why this sudden change of opinion? I could only answer, that I thought so then; but since that time I had changed my opinion, and that I was not answerable now for what I then did in my official capacity. What must the world think of such tergiversation, of such meanness? Is there any man in this House that would countenance such a nefarious procedure? After a solemn guarantee and assignment is entered into, thus to break the public faith, which was

C                      pledged

pledged to preserve their property, is a transaction that honor shrinks from. The Begums were said to be in the habits of disturbing the public peace; but there is no instance on record of any such attempt, until the revolution of Benares; and then all India seemed to be hostile to England.

I would here sit down, and rest my question of censure, on the issue of what has been produced; as it must be clear to every member, that the princesses were entitled to our protection; and that every hostile attempt, to wrest their property from them, was unjust and disgraceful. I require no other proof for this than Mr. Hastings's own words, wherein he says, "That our officious interference made us many foes."

In 1778, we entered into another treaty with the Nabob, which was negotiated by Mr. Middleton, wherein it was stipulated, that the Bhow Begum was not to be molested; and, not long after, Mr. Hastings transmits to the Court of Directors



fectors a distressful picture of the situation of the Nabob, of the horrors and famine which triumphed over his country.

If it were possible for a country to be still more distressed, the Nabob's territories were so in the year 1780; but, at that period, there was a majority in council, whose sentiments were by no means favourable to the persecuting schemes of the Governor; and, for this reason, there was then no offer to molest the property of the Begums.

In the subsequent year, however, the Governor took especial care to furnish himself with power. The treaty of *Chunar* was executed; and surely a treaty, so marked with dissimulation, was never before entered into: the Governor made himself responsible for every political transaction in that ravaged and oppressed country.

Mr. Sheridan said he had now reached the period, when Mr. Hastings's first intentions appeared, to enforce the execution of his projects at all events ; when, by *Mr. Middleton*, his private agent, he urged the Nabob *Asoph ul Dowla*, to break this solemn engagement, sanctioned by the guarantee of the Company, to deprive his mother, and the elder Begum, his grandmother, of the jaghires which were assigned for their support ; and proceeding still farther to plunder them of their treasures, which he had avowed to be their sole property, and which he had solemnly pledged himself should remain inviolate. It was a little difficult, however, here to say, what was the question at issue. It had sometimes been said, that the Nabob had an inherent right to this wealth, as the wealth of the state ; but when it was recollected that it was not made up of the produce of taxes, but collected by the conquests of his father, *Sujah Dowla*, by him bequeathed as a personal acquisition, (prudently for his son,) whom it would only make the object of rapacious attack, and



and to whom he, with more wisdom, bequeathed necessity as his sword, and poverty as his shield; and when it was considered in what manner, and on what condition, it was relinquished by the Nabob, and that dereliction guaranteed by the Company, he thought that ground of defence would scarcely be occupied on the present day. Mr. Hastings in his defence had taken a more extended field, where there was more scope for his delusion, more amplitude for his equivocation. He had admitted the right to have rested in the Begums, but contended that it had been forfeited by their frequent acts of contumacy and rebellion. This allegation against them had been divided into four parts:—The charges were the following.

1. - That they had given disturbances at all times to the Nabob, and that they had long manifested a spirit, hostile to his and to the English government :

2. That they excited the Zemindars to revolt, at the time of the insurrection at

Benares, and of the resumption of the Jaghires :

3. That they resisted by armed force the resumption of their own Jaghires: and

4. That they excited and [were] accessory to the insurrection at Benares.

To each of these charges Mr. Sheridan made distinct and separate answers, by a variety of extracts which he read; some of them written by Mr. Hastings himself, to prove that they had particularly distinguished themselves by their *friendship* for the English, and the various good offices they had rendered Government. Against the *first* charge Mr. Sheridan adduced proofs, in the most pointed terms, from the several letters which passed between Mr. Hastings and Mr. Middleton, Colonel Hannay and the Nabob. By this correspondence it was very evident, that their conduct during the period from 1775 to 1781, so far from being what it was represented, had been mild and inoffensive. Not a  
single



single symptom of inveteracy, not one solid proof of disaffection, was mentioned in these letters, but in all, their conduct appeared as much the reverse, as it was in the nature of things to expect. The *second* charge fell to the ground the instant it was examined; for, so far from any undue influence being used on the part of the *Begums*, to stimulate the Jaghirdars to resistance, it did not even appear that the smallest resistance was made by the jaghirdars, against the violences which they sustained. The third charge was equally false. Did they resist the resumption of their own jaghires? Though, if they had actually resisted, it could not be deemed criminal; for those jaghires were their own property, vested in them and confirmed to them by a solemn treaty. But is there, in fact, one syllable of charge alledged against them? With all the load of obloquy which the Nabob incurred, had he ever accused them of the crime of resisting his authority? No; he had not.

To prove the falsehood of the whole of this charge, and to shew that Mr. Hastings originally projected the plunder; that he threw the Odium in the first instance on the Nabob; that he imputed the crimes to them, before he had received one of the rumours which he afterwards manufactured into affidavits; he recommended a particular attention to dates; and he deduced from the papers these clear facts—that the first idea sprung from Mr. Hastings, on the 25th of November, 1781; that Mr. Middleton communicated it to the Nabob, and procured from him a formal proposition on the 2d of December; That on the 1st of December Mr. Hastings wrote a letter to Mr. Middleton, confirming the first suggestion made through Sir Elijah, which letter came into the hands of Mr. Middleton on the 6th of December. He stated all the circumstances of the pains taken by Mr. Middleton, who was empowered by Mr. Hastings to force the Nabob, on whom all the blame is laid, and whose act it was, to seize on his mother's jaghires; and coupled this with the



the extraordinary minute written by Mr. Hastings on his return to Calcutta, where he stated the resistance of the Begums to the execution of the resumption on the 7th of January, 1782, as the cause of the measure in November, 1781. Mr. Middleton had proved that the Nabob had no such intention, for, in writing to Mr. Hastings, he says, “ finding the Nabob wavering in his determination of the resumption of the Jaghires, I this day, (6th Dec. 1781,) in the presence of his Minister informed him, that unless he would issue *his* perwannahs for that purpose, I would issue *my* perwannahs.”

Mr. Sheridan then took pains to shew, that the Begums were, by their condition, their age, their infirmities, &c. almost the only two souls in India, who could not in some measure have hurt the Government. He did not, he said, take pains to do this from any idea, that, because there was no motive for plundering the women, it might be asserted that it was an improbable falsehood: he was not to learn that there  
was

was such a thing as wantonness of wickedness. Those, who had doubts on this point, had only to read the history of the administration of Mr. Hastings. He proved by the documents, on the table, that there was, and had always been, insurrection and disorder in Oude. To ascribe it to the Begums was the most improbable fiction: they might as well say, that famine would not have pinched, that thirst would not have parched, that extermination would not have depopulated, but for the interference of these old women. To use a strong expression of Mr. Hastings, on another occasion, "The good that those women did was certain; the ill was precarious." He, on the contrary, took the converse of the proposition; wanting a motive for his rapacity, he could find it only in fiction. The simple fact was, their treasure was their treason. They complained of injustice: God of heaven! had they not a right to complain? After a solemn treaty violated, plundered of all their property, and on the eve of the last extremity of wretchedness,

were



were they to be deprived of the last resource of impotent wretchedness, complaint and lamentation? Was it a crime that they should croud together in fluttering trepidation, like a flock of resistless birds in the air, on seeing the felon kite, who, having darted at one devoted bird and missed his aim, singled out a new object, and was springing on his prey with more vigour in his wing, and keener lightning in his eye. The fact with Mr. Hastings was precisely this: having failed in the cause of Cheyt Sing, he saw his fate; he felt the necessity of procuring a sum of money somewhere, for he knew that to be the never-failing receipt to make his peace with the Directors at home.

Such, Mr. Sheridan added, were the true, substantial motives of the horrid excesses perpetrated against the Begums! Excesses, in every part of the description of which, he felt himself supported by the most indisputable evidence. Here he would rest his cause. Let gentlemen lay their hands upon their hearts, and with truth

truth issuing in all its purity from their lips, solemnly declare, whether they were, or were not convinced, that the *real* spring of the conduct of Mr. H. far from being a desire to crush rebellion, *an ideal fabulous rebellion!* was a malignantly rapacious determination to seize, with lawless hands, upon the treasures of devoted, miserable, yet unoffending victims.

Amongst other proofs which Mr. Sheridan brought against the second and fourth charges, was a minute of what *Mr. Stables* proposed at the Board, “Whether any disaffection to the English Government appeared before the troubles of Benares?” Mr. Hastings remained silent.

In the farther discussion of the charges, *Mr. Sheridan* said, it would be necessary for him to follow the Governor General in his tour from *Calcutta* to *Chunar*, which commenced the 8th of July, 1781, a journey he thought necessary to take, finding the Nabob unwilling to seize on  
In



his mother's jaghires. Mr. Hastings had himself said, That he left Calcutta with the strongest idea of the reduced state of the Company's possessions, which the event proved he went to recruit in the most expeditious manner possible. Sir Elijah Impey had said, when under examination, that Mr. Hastings went out with only two resources to retrieve the circumstances of the Company; namely, Benares and Oude; Countries already oppressed by the hand of Providence, but more so by the wicked and arbitrary machinations of man. What a horrid idea! No other resource but the plunder of a famished country! Can any simile equal it? unless I suppose, a person determined on a robbery, and having failed at Bagshot, resolves to try his fortune at Hounslow.

In *Benares* it was sufficiently known that Mr. Hastings had failed. There his prodigal revenge had disappointed his rapacity; whence the unfortunate victim of malicious insolence had been compelled to wan-

wander from his kingdom, a melancholy example of the vicissitude of human affairs. The hopes of plunder at *Oude*, promised to compensate for his miscarriage at *Benares*. Then, and not till then, not thro' any former enmities shewn by the Begims, not thro' any old disturbances, but because he had failed in one place, and that he had but two in his prospect, did he contrive the expedient of plundering these aged women: he had no pretence, he had no excuse for his conduct, but the arrogant and obstinate determination to govern India by his corrupt will. His disappointment at *Benares* urged him with rapid steps to *Oude*, where indeed he was but too successful.

Inflamed by disappointment in his first project, he hastened to the fortress of *Chunar*, to meditate the more atrocious design of instigating a son against his mother; of sacrificing female dignity and distress to parricide and plunder.

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The treaty of *Gbunar*, that nefarious foundation of his future views, being planned, Mr. Hastings thought it necessary, whilst he was invading the substance of justice, to avail himself of her judicial forms, and accordingly sent for Sir Elijah Impey, the Chief Justice of India, to assist him.

Sir Elijah being arrived, Mr. Hastings, with much art, proposed a question of opinion, involving an unsubstantiated fact, in order to obtain even a surreptitious approbation of the measures he had predetermined to adopt.

With regard to the mode of submitting questions to Sir Elijah Impey, it was, he observed, singular and curious. In respect to the affairs of Cheit Sing, Mr. Hastings had stated the question, not in the abstract merely, but accompanied with the fact. To that question Sir Elijah demurred, not caring to commit himself. With regard to the Begums, Mr. Hastings profits by his experience

perience, and states the question in the abstract, saying, "The Begums being in rebellion, is it not warrantable to seize their treasures?" To this, (which like one of the Duke of Richmond's *data*, carries with it its own answer, because *being in rebellion*, the seizure might have been made,) Sir Elijah answers directly and explicitly in the affirmative, thereby not risking any thing.

Not a syllable of enquiry intervened as to the existence of the imputed rebellion; nor a moment's pause, as to the ill purposes to which the decision of a Chief Justice might be perverted. It was not the office of a friend to mix the grave caution and cold circumspection of a judge with an opinion taken in such circumstances; and Sir Elijah had previously declared, that he gave his advice not as a judge, but as a friend; a character he equally preferred in the strange office which he undertook of collecting defensive affidavits on the subject of Benares.

It



It was curious, Mr. Sheridan said, to reflect on the whole of Sir Elijah's circuit at that perilous time. Sir Elijah had stated his desire of relaxing from the fatigues of office, and unbending his mind in a party of health and pleasure; yet, wisely apprehending that very sudden relaxation might defeat its purpose, he contrived to mix some objects of business with his amusements. He had therefore in his little airing of 900 miles, great part of which he went post, escorted by an army, selected those very situations where insurrections subsisted, and rebellion was threatened, and had not only delivered his deep and curious researches into the laws and rights of nations, and of treaties, in the capacity of the oriental Grotius, whom Warren Hastings was to study, but likewise in the humbler and more practical situation of a collector of *ex parte* evidence. In the former quality his opinion was the premature sanction for plundering the Begums. In the latter character he became the posthumous supporter of the ex-

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pulsion

pulsion and pillage of the Rajah Cheyt Sing.

With a generous oblivion of duty and honour, with a proud sense of having authorized all future rapacity, and sanctioned all past oppression, this friendly judge proceeded on his circuit of health and ease; and while the Governor General, sanctioned by his solemn opinion, issued his orders to plunder the Begums of their treasure, Sir Elijah pursued his progress, passing through a wide region of distress and misery, in quest of objects best suited to his feelings, in anxious search of calamities most kindred to his invalid imagination. Friendship, then, made Sir Elijah forget what was due to himself, what was due to the high office in which he was placed, and to the power which had placed him in it. He was the last man who ought to have undertaken such an office. He was bound to have maintained a line of conduct more consonant with the elevation of his rank, the dignity of his office, and the gravity of a judge;



a judge ; who ought to have felt himself incapable of soiling his pure ermine, by condescending to run about the country, like an itinerant informer, with a pedlar's pack of garbled evidence and surreptitious affidavits.

He could not be ignorant of the robbery his errand was intended to cover ; for his first question mooted the point. The judge most gravely informs us, that he was cautioned not to proceed from *Chunar* by way of *Fyzyabad*, as *the Begums were in rebellion*. Most friendly advice indeed ! *Fyzyabad* was many score of miles out of the route of *Lucknow* to *Chunar* ; and, at that moment, peace absolutely prevailed in every part of the country ; his *datum*, therefore would have been discovered to be false. Nor would it have been very pleasant for him to be found at *Fyzyabad*, with the actual order in his pocket, by which they were to be plundered, which happened to be the fact. Here Mr. Sheridan proved what he asserted, by reading extracts from authenticated papers.

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When Mr. Hastings arrived at *Chunar*, he was met by the Nabob with an open and unsuspecting heart. Here the most insidious Treaty on the one part, that ever was entered into, was concerted and concluded; no one article of it being intended for execution on the part of the Governor. In the first article it was stipulated with one he calls an *independent Prince* " That, as  
 " great distress has arisen to the Nabob's  
 " government, from the military power  
 " and dominion assumed by the Jag-  
 " hierdars, he be *permitted* to resume  
 " such as he may find necessary; with  
 " a reserve, that all such, for the amount  
 " of whose Jaghires the Company are  
 " guarantees, shall, in case of the re-  
 " sumption of their lands, be paid the  
 " amount of their net collections, thro'  
 " the Resident, in ready money. And  
 " that no English Resident be appoint-  
 " ed to Furruckabad."

This was solemnly covenanted, in direct infraction of a subsisting guaran-  
 tee



tee for the protection of the Begum's Jaghires. And how was this cloaked? Why, by affidavits, taken extra-judicially by his Majesty's Chief Justice in Bengal, who says very guardedly in his evidence, that several persons deposed that a design was entered into to extirpate the English from India. But when? Not till *after* the transactions at Benares, when the weight of the arm of power compelled that unfortunate Prince, Cheyt Sing, to become an unhappy wanderer, and when the name of *Briton* became detested throughout Hindostan. This artifice was thin, and the veil was easily seen through, for the plan was preconcerted, long before the revolution at Benares took place.

This first article, containing a general permission to the Nabob to confiscate, and take into his hands such Jaghires as he might find necessary, Mr. Hastings *inverted* singularly, by making him confiscate whatever Jaghires he pleased.

The second article stipulated for the withdrawing of the British army from the Province of Oude, which Mr. Hastings did, but inverted the article singularly, by reserving to himself a right to send another army into the Province when he thought proper. The two other articles, the one for withdrawing the British President at Furruckabad, and the other stipulating for putting Fizula Cawn into the hands of the Nabob, both, by a singular inversion, Mr. Hastings rendered of no effect or avail.

The unsuspecting Nabob, in the warmth of friendship, at meeting the Governor, and concluding a Treaty which he thought salutary to his interest, made him a present of ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND POUNDS. This, exclaimed *Mr. Sheridan*, was rank corruption in *Mr. Hastings*. The circumstances of this present were as extraordinary as the thing itself. Four months afterwards, and not till then, Mr. Hastings communicated the matter to the Company;



ny; unfortunately for himself however, this tardy disclosure was conveyed in words which betray his original meaning; for, with no common incaution, he admits the present "*was of a magnitude not to be concealed.*"

Then it was published and made known, that Bills on *Gopaul Doss*, the Banker, (then a prisoner,) were given to the amount mentioned, payable in four months. And this was to be extorted from a country, at the time its Prince declared his inability to pay his debts, and when his minister *Hyder Beg Cawn* declared it to be "*a speaking picture of Famine and Woe.*" Mr. *Sheridan*, in stating all the circumstances of this bribe, averred that the whole had its rise in a principle of rank corruption; for what was the price that he paid? By the treaty he agreed to withdraw all the English gentlemen, and all the English army. He agreed to this at the moment of rebellion and revolt. The other articles of the treaty, as strange, nothing but

the bribe could have occasioned, together with the reserve which he had in his own mind, of treachery to the Nabob; for the only part of the treaty which he ever attempted to carry into execution, was to withdraw the English gentlemen from *Oude*. The Nabob considered this as essential to his deliverance, and his observation on the circumstance was curious; for, "though Major Palmer," *said he*, "has not asked any thing, I observe it is the custom of the English gentlemen constantly to ask for something of me before they go." This imputation on the English Mr. Hastings countenanced, most readily, and rejoiced at it, as it was a screen and shelter for his own abandoned profligacy; and therefore, at the very moment that he was himself plundering the Nabob, with his usual gravity and cant, making a feint of executing this part of the Treaty; "Go," *said he*, to the English gentlemen; "Go, you set of oppressive rascals; Go from this worthy unhappy man, whom *you* have

"plun-



“plundered, and leave him to *my* pro-  
 “tection. You have robbed him, you  
 “have taken advantage of his accumu-  
 “lated distresses; but, please God, he  
 “shall in future be at rest; for I have  
 “promised he shall never see the face  
 of an Englishman again.” This how-  
 ever was the only part of the treaty  
 which he even attempted to fulfil; and  
 we learn from himself, that, at the very  
 moment he made it, he intended to de-  
 ceive the Nabob. That he advised *ge-*  
*neral*, instead of *partial* resumption, in  
 order to defeat the end and view of the  
 Nabob; and, instead of having given  
 instant and unqualified assent to all the  
 articles of the treaty, he had perpetually  
 qualified, explained, and varied them  
 with new diminutions and reservations.

He had suffered the Nabob to take  
 their Jaghiers from several Jaghierdars;  
 but he had compelled him to deprive  
 others of their's according to his will:  
 he withdrew the army according to the

with

wish of the vizier, but it was only to send back almost instantly an equivalent force : he resigned the fortresses, but to garrison them again immediately. This might by the friends of Mr. Hastings, be deemed policy ; but surely it was too clumsy a fraud, too gross a fallacy, to deserve that name. It was however like the man, though unlike the greatness ascribed to him.

Mr. Sheridan put the whole of this into a very glaring point of view, and called upon gentlemen to say, if there was any thing in Machiavel, any treachery upon record, if they had ever heard of any cold Italian fraud, that could in any degree be put in comparison with the disgusting hypocrisy, and unequalled baseness, that Mr. Hastings had shewn on that occasion.

In his defence, Mr. Hastings had made it his boast, that the conduct of his life had been uniformly governed by the rules of *honour and plain dealing*. He  
asked,



asked, how was this bold and daring assertion to be reconciled to his whole conduct throughout the affair of the Begums? In every part of which, obliquity, fraud, falsehood, treachery, oppression, the most glaring violation of justice, and the most open breach of solemn engagements, were the great and leading features. He had heard it said by some of his admirers, but who were not so implicit as to give unqualified applause to his crimes, that they found an apology for the atrocity of his actions in the greatness of his mind. He could not, upon the closest examination of his conduct, discover the smallest symptoms of either a great mind, or great ability. To estimate the solidity of such a defence, it would be sufficient, merely to consider in what consisted this prepossessing distinction, this captivating characteristic of greatness of mind. It was the characteristic of magnanimity to aim at attaining a great end by great means; to support truth, to protect the weak, to relieve the oppressed, to right the

in-

injured, to punish those that had done wrong; and, on no consideration, to countenance injustice. In these traits, and these alone, we are to discover true estimable magnanimity; to them alone we can justly affix the splendid titles and honours of real greatness. Were these the characteristicks of Mr. Hastings? Directly the reverse. Mr. Hastings, in his conduct and in his writings, exhibited a system made up of things unnaturally conjoined. His letters and his minutes were full of strutting meanness, bombastical prevarication, and ridiculously violent contradictions in terms; just as the mass and magnitude of his crimes were contrasted with the littleness of his motives, and the low means he could condescend to for the attainment of his objects. The most groveling ideas, he conveyed in the most inflated language, giving mock consequence to low cavils, and uttering quibbles in heroics; so that his compositions disgusted the mind's taste, as much as his actions excited the soul's abhorrence.



rence. In short, he appeared to be a mixture of the trickster and the tyrant, at once a Scapin and a Dionysius. It seemed that all his actions were directed by a low, underhand, crooked, policy ; as well might the writhing obliquity of the serpent be compared to the direct and unvaried swiftness of the arrow, as the duplicity of Mr. Hastings's ambition, to the simple steadiness of genuine magnanimity. Mr. Hastings, if he ever acted with wisdom, it was with perverted wisdom.

Mr. Sheridan said, that this mixture of character seemed, by some unaccountable, but inherent, quality, to be appropriated in inferior degrees to every thing that concerned his employers. He remembered to have heard a learned gentleman (Mr. Dundas) remark, that there was something in the original frame and constitution of the Company, which carried the sordid ideas of the mercantile principle on which it was founded, always about them ; so that,  
even

even in all their measures and actions, we saw the paltry character. Their civil policy and their military achievements were connected with and contaminated by the meanness of pedlars, and the profligacy of pirates. Thus we saw *auctioneering ambassadors*, and *trading generals*.—And thus we saw a revolution brought about by *affidavits*, an army employed in *executing an arrest*, a town besieged on a *note of hand*; a prince dethroned for *the balance of an account*. They exhibited a government, in which they had all the mock majesty of a *bloody sceptre*; and the little *traffick of a merchant's counting house*, wielding a truncheon with one hand, and he might truly say, *picking a pocket with the other*.

He then proceeded to state the conduct of Mr. Hastings, in enforcing the resumption of the Jaghire, and the plunder of the envied treasure, of the Begums. On the 27th of Nov. 1781, his pleasure concerning that business was first sent, through  
Sir



Sir Elijah Impey, to Mr. Middleton. On the 1st of December this was backed by a written order; and it was not, until the 8th of January following, that the Nabob could be prevailed on to dismiss his scruples; nor, until threatened with the severest displeasure of the Governor General, that he could be compelled to repair to Fyzyabad, to obey the unnatural mandate, by plundering his parents. A resistance was then made by the friends of the Begums, on finding the violence intended to them. But, strange to tell! this resistance was absolutely alledged by Mr. Hastings in his defence, as the sole cause of the violence! That is to say, the resistance of an unjust attack not made until after the 8th of January, 1782, was alledged as the foundation of the pleasure signified on the 27th of November, 1781, of the written order by which that was enforced, and all the determinations which had so long preceded! Or, in other words, the order was said to be founded on a resistance made to its being executed,

near

near six weeks after that order was first issued.

Having gone through the facts of the transactions which made up the charge, *Mr. Sheridan* next adverted to the affidavits exhibited, and sworn before Sir *Elijah Impey*; and though he said he might fairly throw them aside, and put them out of the question, on account of the indirect manner in which they were obtained, and the strange and irrelevant testimony they afforded, yet he would wave all objection to them on those grounds, and examine them with as much seriousness, as if they were correctly formal, and every way unexceptionable; they were all, he said, conceived in one spirit, and formed upon one plan. He then read the Affidavit of *Mr. Middleton*, and clearly pointed out how futile and presumptuous were the grounds upon which he had, *to the satisfaction of his conscience*, proceeded to the utmost extremity of violence against the Begums. "The God of Justice," exclaimed he, "for-



“ forbid that any man in this House  
 “ should make up his mind to accuse  
 “ Mr. Hastings on the ground that  
 “ Mr. Middleton condemned the Be-  
 “ gums.” He next animadverted on  
 the depositions of Colonel Hannay, Co-  
 lonel Gordon, Major M'Donald, Major  
 Williams, and others, from which he  
 struck out a variety of such brilliant  
 detections as baffle memory to follow.

Amongst a variety of glaring circum-  
 stances he pointed out the following :

Major Williams, amidst other ru-  
 mours, stated one that “ *he had heard :*”  
 That 50 British troops, watching 200  
 prisoners, had been surrounded by  
 6000 of the enemy, and must inevitably  
 have fallen a sacrifice, if they had not  
 been relieved by the approach of a de-  
 tachment of *nine* men. With this  
 assistance they had entirely driven away  
 the enemy, and slain several hundreds  
 of them. Considering the character  
 given by Mr. H. to the British army in  
 E Oude,

Oude, that they manifested a rage for rapacity and speculation; it was extraordinary that there were no instances of flouter swearing. Of Mr. M. he said, that he liked not the memory which remembered things better at the end of five years, than at the time, unless there might be something so relaxing in the climate of India, affecting the memory as well as the nerves, by which the traces of actions were lost; and that men must return to their native air of England and be braced up, and have their memories like their sinews, re-strung.

Mr. Sheridan pointed out many other improbabilities, and having in very strong colours painted the loose quality of the affidavits, and clearly and incontrovertibly shewn the partiality and injustice, which was contained in them against the Begums, he solemnly appealed to that side of the House which was more peculiarly interested in law-proceedings. They saw that, that House  
was



was the path to fortune in their profession; that they might soon, and some of them were, to be called to a dignified situation, where the great and important trust would be reposed in them, of protecting the lives and properties of their fellow-subjects.

One learned gentleman in particular, was, if rumour spoke right, soon to be called to succeed that bright luminary of the law, whose sun he feared was setting, but whose departure from the seat of active justice was splendid and magnificent, in its being done while he possessed a mind on which time had not power to lay his hand: Of the learned Gentleman, the successor, he must say, that there was not one circumstance of his life, except perhaps his activity on an election contest, that did not distinguish him as a most proper person to fill the important seat. He desired to ask that learned Gentleman, and every other of the profession, would he lay his hand upon his breast, and

solemnly declare, if upon such evidence as the mass of depositions taken at Lucknow, any one of them could venture to say that, sitting as a Judge, he would be legally warranted to convict any, the meanest individual of an offence, however trivial. If any one would say he could, he declared to God he would sit down, and not add a syllable more to the too long trespass he had made on the patience of the committee.

Here Mr. Sheridan craved the indulgence of the House (*a general and loud cry of hear! hear!*) whilst he for a moment enquired into the *spirit and temper* of the affidavits, on which the ruin of the unfortunate Begums was founded. *Colonel Gordon* had exhibited a flagrantly conspicuous proof of the *grateful spirit and temper* of affidavits, designed to plunge these wretched women in irretrievable ruin. Colonel Gordon was but just before *not merely released from danger, but preserved from imminent death*. That gentleman was in the hands of the insurgents,  
and



and his release was entirely effected by the negociation of the Bhow Begum. Yet even at the expiration of two little days from his deliverance, he deposes against the distressed and unfortunate woman, who had become his *saviour*; and *only* upon *hearsay evidence*, accuses her of crimes and rebellion. Upon this occasion she manifested the strongest attachment to the English interest; for, in her private letters and dispatches to Colonel Hannay, she particularly desired that the Zemindars might not be informed of her interposition in favor of the Colonel: this was at once a bold and convincing proof of her unalterable attachment. Was this a proof of rebellion? “*Great God of justice,*” (exclaimed the orator) “*canst thou from thy eternal throne look down upon such premeditated turpitude of heart, and not fix some dreadful mark of obloquy upon the perpetrators?*”

If, continues Mr. Sheridan, these affidavits, because they are a mere collection of hearsays, without a tittle of any

thing like legal evidence in their composition, could not (as I am certain is the case) be received in a court of law, nor be brought forward in a court of equity, was it a species of evidence sufficient to justify a wanton act of oppression, of violence and gross injustice, committed against two princesses; the one the wife, the other the mother of the deceased Nabob *Sujah ul Dowlah*.

Mr. Hastings asserts, that the resumption of the Jaghires was no injury to the Begums, for they had their revenue of them delivered regularly.—But that was not truth.—They never had an equivalent—they were referred for payment to a bankrupt, on the faith of a broken guarantee. There never was any information that could warrant the seizure of the Jaghires. It was not done with the consent of the Nabob, though he was forced by Mr. Middleton to give his nominal assent thereto; for Mr. Middleton had written to Mr. Hastings, that *a fixed melancholy had seized the Nabob, on his*  
*being*



*being forced to plunder his mother.* Mr. Middleton had written to Mr. Hastings for his orders, on the 1st of December, 1781, which arrived on the 6th, and on the 29th of the same month the whole was put in execution; but as they perfectly knew it was a matter that of course must make much noise, it was deemed necessary by Mr. Hastings and his party, to throw the whole of the odium on the Nabob, by insisting that the proposition came from him.—But the very letter in which it was asserted that, the Nabob had not only given his consent, but even proposed this detestable measure, could not be produced; nor any one paper, article or authentic evidence to that effect, notwithstanding the industry with which it had been reported.

The Nabob in his letter to Mr. Hastings, never gave the least hint, that either his mother or grandmother were in rebellion, or that they had shewn an inclination to assist or join with *Chey Sing*,

or

or that they meant to extirpate the English, or dethrone him.

Mr. Sheridan proceeded to demonstrate, that the princesses were in every sense of the word, entitled to their Jaghires and possessions, as much as any lady in England to her dower, on the death of her Lord. That this opinion had not so much as been called in question, till the time that Mr. Hastings began to set his heart upon their treasures;—and that asserting the contrary, under the Mahomedan law, was neither founded in justice, reason, nor even that law, and this, Mr. Sheridan proved beyond the power of contradiction.

He then shewed, from a variety of statements from Mr. Hastings's own papers, that the Nabob never entertained an idea that the possessions of his mother were his, during her life—on the contrary, that his father *Sujah ul Dowlah*, had left her in the tranquil possession of those estates and treasures, for the mere purpose of supporting her dignity in the stile be-  
com-



coming her rank and birth.—Mr. Sheridan observed, that when *Asoph ul Dowla* blamed his father for leaving so little wealth, he thought like an unwise prince—His father *Sujah ul Dowla* acted prudently, in leaving him with no temptation about him, to invite acts of violence from the rapacious. “He cloathed him with poverty as a shield, and armed him with necessity as a sword.”

In consequence of his poverty and distresses, the *Bhow Begum* his mother it was true, made her son many presents, and even lent him money, for which he had given an equivalent; and once, on his representing his distressed situation, she had returned all his pledges and a very large sum of money, such as she thought would finally put an end to his distresses. The Nabob her son had given a receipt to that effect, which receipt was read by Mr. Sheridan, who strongly pointed out the obligation he was under to her. He then enlarged upon the character and estimation in which the

Prin-

Princesses were held, and in the most pathetic language, dwelt on the purity of their conduct, the reciprocal return of filial and parental affection.

When Mr. Middleton went to seize Fyzabad, the eunuchs were taken prisoners, as was the Fouzder of Tanda; him however, it was not thought necessary to detain; he had not the key of the treasure; the eunuchs had that, and they of course were the principal objects.—It was asserted that the Nabob gave puerile excuses for not plundering his mother.—Reasons for not performing the worst of actions, the most unnatural crime, that of a child ruining his parent, was by a Christian Governor thought puerile.—Was it to be supposed that, two old, infirm women, whose whole dependence was on the British possession, one of whom had been a witness of the success of the British arms, for the British arms had deposed her husband, Sujah ul Dowlah, and British generosity had again placed him in his dominions, should wish to extirpate the English?—

Saib



Saib Ally's behaviour was passed over, as having done more good, by preserving a few prisoners, than he had done harm; Why was not the same favour shewn to the Begums? When the foot of the oppressor was taken off, the trodden on rose against the persecutor, as against another Sujah. What a miserable situation must the poor unfortunate wretches be in, to have those for their judges, who would benefit by their destruction!

When the Court of Directors sent to Mr. Hastings, to revise the charge against the Begums, and Mr. Stables moved that revision in council, he was over-ruled by Mr. Hastings, who said, that "*the majesty of justice ought to be approached with solicitation, and that it would debase itself by the suggestion of wrongs, and the promise of redress.*"—Conscious however of the enormity of his conduct, he apologizes to the Court of Directors, by stating, that it would be "*a very severe task for a mother to impeach her son;*"—so that according to his idea, it was no crime for a son

son to rob and plunder his parents, but it was a crime of a very deep dye, for an injured parent to complain of the outrage of her child.

He next proceeded to shew, that Mr. Hastings, and *he alone*, was the actor and perpetrator of those crimes. That he was regularly acquainted with all the enormities committed, there was the clearest proof. It was true that Middleton was rebuked for not being more exact. He did not, perhaps, descend to the detail; he did not give him an account of the number of groans, which were heaved, of the quantity of tears which were shed, of the weight of the fetters, or of the depth of the dungeons; but he communicated every step that he took to accomplish the base and unwarrantable end. He proved by his letters, dated in Jan. 1782, that he alone was responsible for the whole proceedings. Mr. Hastings well knew that, the jaghire and the treasure were the only means which the Begums were in possession of, to support the numerous family  
of



of the late Nabob, amounting to more than two thousand persons.

After having in the most pathetic and forcible manner given an affecting description of the distresses of these unfortunate princesses, he went farther into the exposure of the evidence ; into a comparison of dates and the subsequent circumstances, in order to prove that, all the enormous consequences that followed from the resumption, in the captivity of the women and the imprisonment and cruelties practised upon their people, were solely to be ascribed and imputed to *Mr. Hastings*. He said that *Mr. Hastings* had once remarked, “ that a mind touched  
“ with superstition might have contem-  
“ plated the fate of the Rohillas with  
“ peculiar impressions.” But if indeed the mind of *Mr. Hastings* had been touched with superstition ; if *his* fancy could suffer any disturbance, and even in vision, he could imagine that he beheld the great spirit of *Sujah Dowlab* looking down on the ruin he had wrought on his house—in  
that

that palace which Mr. Hastings had first wrested from his hand, and afterwards restored to him;—plundered by that very army, by which Sujah Dowlah had been able to vanquish the Mahrattas—seizing on the very plunder which he had ravaged from the Rohillas;—*that* MIDDLETON who had been engaged in managing the previous violations, most busy to perpetrate the last; *that* very HASTINGS, whom on his death-bed he had left the guardian of his wife and mother, and family; turning all those dear relatives, the objects of his solemn trust, forth to the merciless season, and to a more merciless soldiery!—A mind touched with superstition, must indeed have cherished such a contemplation with very peculiar impressions.

Mr. Hastings had endeavoured to throw a portion of the guilt upon the Council, although Mr. Wheeler had never taken any share, and Mr. M'Pherson was not arrived in India when the scene began. *Mr. Sheridan* remarked, that he had  
shrunk



shrank from the inquiry ordered by the Court of Directors under the new, and pompous doctrine, that the majesty of justice was to be approached with supplication, and was not to degrade itself, by hunting for crimes. If his picture of justice was right, then the Committees of this House, in the examination of Smith, were wrong—Mr. Dundas was wrong.—He hoped however, that Mr. Hastings would be found wrong.

“I trust,” said the eloquent Speaker, “that this House will vindicate the insulted character of justice,—that they will demonstrate its true quality, essence, and purposes,—that they will evidence it to be, in the case of Mr. Hastings, *active, inquisitive, and avenging.*”

Mr. Sheridan having in the course of his wonderful Speech taken a most comprehensive view of the business, and examined with the most elaborate research and scrutinizing attention, every circumstance with which it was connected;

nected ; having urged every thing which  
 he thought necessary to develop the  
 iniquitous conduct of Mr. Hastings, to  
 substantiate the charge, and to establish  
 it by the incontrovertible evidence of  
 an infinity of facts ; he drew towards a  
 conclusion, by stating a summary of the  
 great points contained in it. He con-  
 tended and maintained that it was evi-  
 dent the Begums had done nothing to  
 merit such violence, that the pretence  
 of their having been the fomenters of  
 rebellion, with a view to exterminate  
 the English from the province of Oude,  
 was a mere pretence, wholly unfound-  
 ed, and not supported by any evi-  
 dence, and that such an idea had never  
 been conceived, until Mr. Hastings con-  
 cluded that to be the probable means, and  
 a favourite resource for the obtainment of  
 money,—a resource that he was deter-  
 mined, in defiance of reason, justice,  
 and humanity, and at all events, to  
 make certain of. Mr. Hastings had violat-  
 ed the solemn guarantee of the Company,  
 and had broken their faith, pledged by  
 treaty ;



treaty; he had throughout his conduct been guided by baseness, falsehood, and oppression; entering into treaties, and framing stipulations, which at the moment he was concluding and agreeing upon, he had no purpose of fulfilling.—Mr. Hastings had degraded and sunk the dignity and character of the highest and most honourable office, that of a *Chief Justice*, by making *Sir Elijah Impey* run about the country collecting affidavits.—He had, by paltry quibbles, and pitiful evasions, neglected to proceed upon the enquiry directed by the Board at the India-House; taking a mean advantage of the Directors orders, and had cloathed that evasion with a pompous parade of words, and a ridiculous display of nonsensical phrases on the majesty of Justice.—That through the whole of the transaction the conduct of the Governor-General had been marked with the most scandalous duplicity, the basest perfidy, the most unparalleled and grinding oppression, and the most insolent, wanton, and un-

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manly

manly cruelty.—He had made a son plunder his mother and grand-mother, and reduced to distress two princesses of high rank;—he had sullied and disgraced the British name and character.

Mr. Hastings, he observed, was a man of wonderful prescience, for it was evident that he knew nothing of what would lend his conduct a colour of justification, till after it was over; but he *foresaw* that there would be proof of a rebellion, and,—strange to tell!—it turned out exactly as he predicted.

Mr. Sheridan then made a solemn appeal to the House, conveyed in such a sublime and astonishing stile of elegance, and worked up with such pathos and dignity, in such fascinating language, that the House was wrapped in mute attention: To keep way with him through such a rapid stream of eloquence, defies all power of retention: it was wholly impracticable to do more than watch the current as it flowed,  
and



and now and then casually to grasp some passing flowers, within our reach.

He stated to the House, that the matter of charge was no question of party. Factions and parties, he knew, existed in that house. The prerogative of the Crown found its advocates among the people's representatives. The privileges of the people met with their opponents. Habits, connections, parties, all led to a diversity of opinions. The measures of every minister were supported by one body of men, and thwarted by another; but on great questions, they had, he was happy to remark, often distinguished themselves, by laying aside all petty party considerations, and acting with a firmness and decision that reflected honour upon their character. — When Inhumanity presented itself, when the majesty of Justice was to be supported, he trusted no division could be found among them. When the former became the object of their attention, they would sit upon it as their com-

common enemy, as if the character of the land were involved in their zeal for its ruin, and they would leave it not, till it was completely overthrown.—He hoped they would now step forward, regardless of the minister,—regardless of the influence of the Crown,—and vote against the most enormous crimes that ever disgraced human nature.—On the present occasion, they were called upon to retrieve millions of their fellow creatures from a state of misery and oppression. It was true, they could not see the innumerable beings, whose wretchedness they would relieve; the multitudes of famished females had not reached the House, and terrified it into a contemplation of their miseries; but for that reason, the more magnanimous would their conduct be, the more glorious their determination to punish such delinquency. Was a British Parliament to wait for their bar to be surrounded with the screams of expiring children, and the shrieks of starving women, before they stooped to redress their grievances?—No—Let the world behold



behold an example, that the Commons of Great-Britain will stretch the strong arm of justice across the habitable globe, to shew in glowing colours the greatness and power of a British Parliament, in reprobating injustice, in stigmatizing inhumanity, and in delivering over to condign punishment, those who used unlimited power, merely for the purposes of tyranny, oppression, rapacity, and perfidy. It was not given to that House, as it was to the officers who had the felicity to relieve, and the still greater transport of a susceptible mind, to perceive the extatic emotions of gratitude in the instant of deliverance. They could not behold the workings of the heart, the quivering lips, the trickling tears, the loud, though tremulous joys of the millions, whom their vote that night would snatch from the tyranny of *corrupt power*. But, though these circumstances were not perceptible to them, was not the true enjoyment of benevolence encreased, by the blessing being conferred unseen: Would not the *omnipotence of British justice, and a British*

*Parliament* be demonstrated, to the wonder of nations, by stretching its mighty arm across the Globe, and saving by its *fiat* millions from destruction ! And would the blessings of the people, thus saved, diffuse in empty air ! No !—" Heaven," says he, " if I may dare to use the figure, " —Heaven itself shall become the Agent " to receive the blessings of their pious " gratitude, and to waft them to your " bosoms."

Mr. Sheridan returned his warmest thanks to the House for the indulgence he had experienced in a speech that carried him beyond the limits of his strength ; but he trusted, that strength would soon be repaired, from the consideration of having endeavoured to discharge his duty in the support of untainted innocence.

He then concluded,

" It is with confidence I now move  
" Sir, that Warren Hastings be impeach-  
" ed."

The



The question was then read by the clerk to the following purpose :

“ That the Committee, upon hearing  
 “ evidence, and considering the said charge,  
 “ are of opinion, that there is sufficient  
 “ ground to impeach Warren Hastings,  
 “ Esq ; of High Crimes and Misdemean-  
 “ ours, upon the matter of the said  
 “ charge,”

*Mr. Burgefs* spoke for nearly an hour in defence of Mr. Hastings, which defence he grounded on the 10th report, when

*Sir William Dolben* rose, and observed, that Mr. Sheridan having in his speech stated in so able a manner, such a variety of facts and arguments, as must have exhausted the spirits, as well as the attention of the Committee, he therefore recommended an adjournment.

*Mr. Stanhope* was of the same opinion, and was determined not to give his vote, till he had again collected his reason, and  
 had

had given the subject a new and serious consideration.

*Mr. Fox* argued against the adjournment.

*Major Scott* rose, and accused *Mr. Sheridan* of having been guilty of *most gross misrepresentations*; that in referring to several parts of the correspondence relative to the Begums, *he had omitted several parts of the letters*, and offered to proceed to the proof, when

*The Chancellor of the Exchequer*, in a very candid and liberal manner, passed many deserving and high encomiums on *Mr. Sheridan's* speech, and was strenuous for the adjournment.

*Mr. Fox* replied to *Mr. Pitt*, and in a speech of some length, still opposed any adjournment:—this brought up

*Mr. Wilberforce*, who, for similar reasons with *Mr. Pitt*, *Sir William Dolben*, and *Mr. Stanhope*, was anxious to adjourn.

Mr.



*Mr. Fox* rose to explain, and amongst other things said, that an adjournment would certainly impress the public mind with a very unfavourable opinion of *Mr. Hastings's* cause.

*Mr. Sheridan* said, that he should not again have troubled the Committee, had it not been to clear up a foul, and he must say, an unjust aspersions cast against him, of *misrepresenting*, or of not reading the evidence faithfully; he protested that he had not, to the best of his knowledge, omitted a single sentence that was material; and that his wish was, to state the whole faithfully; as to the adjournment, the Committee would see his reason for not saying any thing on the subject. *Mr. Martin*, *Mr. Montague*, and *Mr. St. John*, severally spoke, when

*Mr. Sheridan* rose a third time, and said, that if Gentlemen really meant to press it to a decision, he did not wish to take the sense of the House on the question of adjournment.

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*Sir William Dolben's* motion was then read, and passed without a division; and the Speaker having resumed the chair, the House adjourned at half past One.

#### THURSDAY the 8th.

The House having met, and resolved itself into a Committee, the subject was resumed. *Mr. Pitt* bore a conspicuous part in the debate. At the conclusion of his speech,

*Mr. Sheridan* rose, and said, that after the extraordinary indulgence which he had the honour to experience last night, he would now trespass but a few minutes on their time. He felt himself, however, called upon to congratulate the Right Hon. Gentleman, (*Mr. Pitt,*) on the very able, candid, and manly, manner in which he had delivered his sentiments on that occasion. He congratulated the House, he congratulated his country, that in the cause of humanity, they saw a Minister who was not to be biassed by any motives  
of



of political interest, who by his conduct on that day, had placed his character above the reach of suspicion. He was not so vain as to imagine, that any arguments he had advanced on the subject had made any impression on the Right Honourable Gentleman's mind; if they had, it was more a tribute to the cause of truth and justice than a compliment to him.

With respect to what the Hon. Gentleman (Major Scott) had mentioned, of his being alluded to as one of the *dependents* of Mr. Hastings, Mr. Sheridan declared upon his honour, that, if he made use of such an expression, he had not the smallest intention of conveying any insinuation that tended to reflect on the Hon. Gentleman. He had every allowance to make for opinions that were formed on the prejudices of human nature. He was not surprised that the Hon. Gentleman viewed the conduct of Mr. Hastings in a light different from other men, for when the *heart* acknowledged an obligation, it would

would never suffer the *judgment* to be influenced by it. If he had uttered harsh expressions, he declared they were not the result of malignity, or the offspring of vindictive malice;—he thanked God, he had a heart incapable of cherishing either, and, if he had spoken warmly, it was on a question which, he confessed had deeply agitated his mind and excited his feelings. That question would soon come before another tribunal, and which would decide between the House of Commons and Mr. Hastings.

Several other Gentlemen having spoken, the question was at last put, and the house divided, when the numbers were,

Ayes	175
Noes	68

Majority for Mr. Sheridan's Motion } 107

F I N I S.





